DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 417 434 CS 509 772

AUTHOR	Olsen, Richard
TITLE	The Future of OCAC: An Argument for the Conceptual Framing of the Oral Communication across the Curriculum Movement.
PUB DATE	1996-11-00
NOTE	27p.; Revised version of a paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Speech Communication Association (82nd, San Diego, CA, November 23-26, 1996).
PUB TYPE	Opinion Papers (120) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Classroom Techniques; *Communication Skills; Higher Education; *Instructional Development; Learning Strategies; Literacy; Political Issues; *Speech Communication; *Student Needs
IDENTIFIERS	*Conceptual Frameworks; Historical Background; *Oral Communication Across the Curriculum; Orality

ABSTRACT

This paper suggests that the usefulness of current discussion of the Oral Communication Across the Curriculum (OCAC) issues and programs is limited by a lack of historical and conceptual grounding. The history of the OCAC movement is summarized and then four perspectives are suggested as ways to better understand the past, present, and future of OCAC: (1) orality and literacy; (2) historical perspective; (3) diffusion and networking; and (4) political perspective. The integration of these perspectives into the discussion of OCAC would better clarify the problematic issues associated with OCAC and guide individual programs and the field on how OCAC might function as a positive aspect of the field without undermining the credibility of communication as a field of study. (Contains 36 references.) (Author)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 417 434

RUNNING HEAD: Conceptual Framing of OCAC

The Future of OCAC: An Argument for the Conceptual Framing of the Oral Communication Across the Curriculum Movement

Richard Olsen

Dept. of Communication Studies

University of North Carolina at Wilmington

601 S. College Rd.

Wilmington, NC 28403-3297

(910) 962-3710

olsenr@uncwil.edu

An earlier version of this paper was presented at the 1996 SCA Convention in San Diego.

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

✓ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

R. Olsen

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

CS 509772

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Abstract

This paper suggests that the usefulness of current discussion of OCAC issues and programs is limited by a lack of historical and conceptual grounding. The history of the OCAC movement is summarized and then four perspectives are suggested as ways to better understand the past, present, and future of OCAC: 1) Orality and literacy, 2) historical perspective 3) diffusion and networking, and 4) political perspective. The integration of these perspectives into the discussion of OCAC would better clarify the problematic issues associated with OCAC and guide individual programs and the field on how OCAC might function as a positive aspect of our field without undermining the credibility of communication as a field of study.

The Future of OCAC: An Argument for the Conceptual Framing of the Oral Communication Across the Curriculum Movement

For physics, for chemistry, for engineering--it matters not how superficially unrelated to language the branch of study may be--command of language will prognosticate aptitude. Facility with words bespeaks a capacity to learn relations and grasp concepts; it is a means of access to the complex reality. Richard Weaver[1]

A report from the subcommittee of the educational policies board of the National Communication Association (NCA), (formerly the Speech Communication Association), was tabled for well over a year by the NCA legislative board despite unanimous approval by the subcommittee. The source of the tension lied in what seems on the surface to be a harmless pedagogical movement commonly known as oral communication across the curriculum or OCAC.[2] The basic mission of such programs is that faculty "from disciplines other than communication are encouraged to incorporate oral communication activities into their existing course, both to enhance learning and to improve oral communication competencies of students" (Morreale, Shockley-Zalabak, & Whitney, 1993, p. 10.). Ideally then, "students are called on throughout their college years to give class presentations, work in groups and hold conferences with instructors" (Cronin and Glenn, 1990, p. 6-7). In 1996 the Legislative Council of NCA approved some basic tenants to OCAC but the question of why OCAC invited such controversy and the role it can/should play within the discipline remains unclear.

---

[1] This quotation, a potential banner for Language Across the Curriculum movements, was taken from Language is Sermonic, page 48. In light of this statement one wonders what a conservative traditionalist like Weaver would think of movements such as WAC and OCAC.

[2] There are other acronyms for the movement including SALAD (Speaking and Listening Across Disciplines) and SAC (Speaking Across the Curriculum). However, SALAD seems a bit too frivolous and, having witnessed the efforts necessary in a SACS review (Southern Association of Colleges and Schools), SAC carries too much resemblance for my liking! Thus, OCAC will be used by the author throughout this effort.

Cronin and Glenn (1991) observed that the common rationale for OCAC programs "is based on observations by business and education leaders that college graduates do not possess adequate written and oral communication skills--skills best developed by emphasizing them in a variety of courses across the curriculum" (p. 356). Studies such as those one done by Curtis, Winsor, and Stephens (1989) and Rubin and Graham (1988) indicate the priority placed on communication skills by personnel directors and the apparent correlation between communication skills and collegiate success, support central claims of the OCAC movement. Clark (1992) noted that "OCAC programs emerged with increasing frequency in the 1980s" (p. 1). So it would seem that the OCAC movement is merely a pragmatic response to the perceived needs of undergraduates to promote the active learning of course content while developing communication skills seen as necessary in the work place.

Despite the apparent face-value simplicity of the movement, it has generated controversy within the field of speech communication. It has also failed to generate consistent acceptance within universities and colleges. These set backs may be better understood if the OCAC movement were examined as something more than a pedagogical method.

Much of what has been published concerning OCAC has focused on one or more of four basic themes. 1) What is OCAC's impact on the "greased pole" (Phillips, 1984, p. 25) of communication competence , 2) What is OCAC's impact on learning and student satisfaction in content-area courses, 3) How do we effectively assess issues one and two, and 4) "How we did it at our place," which is in other words, a fairly generic summary, or to borrow from Kaplan, a "reconstructed logic" of how the program was implemented at a given campus. While these themes are central issues worthy of continued discussion in communication journals, an argument

chronological development of the OCAC movement, this article will offer four alternative vantage points from which to view the past, present and future of the OCAC movement.

The First OCAC Program

To truly expose the roots of the OCAC movement, one would need to trace back past the Writing Across the Curriculum movement (WAC) in America to a general " 'language across the curriculum' movement that began in Great Britain in the 1960s" (Parker, 1985 qtd. in Cronin & Glenn, 1991, p. 356). However, it is commonly recognized that the first true OCAC program in the United States began at Central College in Iowa during 1976 (Roberts, 1995).

Roberts, a professor at Central College at the time, described the environment in which the first program was conceived. In an interview he said, "It was a sort of close, family-type environment, oriented toward teaching...if I remember correctly the idea started in '74...just in general talking" (Roberts, 1995). According to Roberts, Central had a cohesive organizational culture and had experienced a large influx of new faculty which minimized the role of tradition at the college. He described it as "a very heady time there."

In addition to Roberts, English professor Barbara Fassler was also a catalyst for the first OCAC program at Central. Fassler was writing a grant to initiate a WAC program and solicited feedback from faculty members including Roberts. Roberts suggested adding an oral component (among others) to the grant proposal and Fassler agreed. The OCAC component strengthened the grant enough to secure three years of funding.

While this grant allowed Roberts and Fassler to train almost two-thirds of the faculty over one summer, the program required " a big leap of faith" since budget cuts were a reality for Central at the time the program was being initiated (Roberts, 1995). Roberts said, "The huge

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

leap of faith was not to require a beginning course for all students to take, [we felt] that if we required a beginning course people would say, 'Well, that's all you need' and stop there."

The faculty, however, bought into the concept without much initial resistance. The program received another boost when a local corporation, impressed by the communication skills of Central graduates during interviews, provided significant funds to continue the program. Looking back on the program as he left it, Roberts stated, "It's part of the culture now...it would be impossible to cut it loose."

Clark (1992) paints a different picture. While visiting the campus in 1991, Clark "gained the impression that the program currently has a low profile, that competency programs [installed at the department level] have not worked well due to a lack of campus-wide standards [sic] and lack of a consistent assessment program" (p. 3). In addition, the communication faculty seemed to have only peripheral involvement. This appears to be a negative outgrowth of what Roberts initially saw as a positive strategy. "We tried not to put English and speech people in the central-most positions so that the steering committee was actually chaired by content area people, not process area people" (Roberts, 1995). This brief oral history, provided by Roberts, of the first OCAC program at Central College illustrates that there are issues beyond pedagogical ones involved in the OCAC movement.

Current Status of the Movement

According to Clark (1992), only 20 OCAC programs were in existence in 1991 (p. 1). The number of programs continues to rise but not without causalities. More problematic however, is that an agreed upon "standard" for what constitutes an OCAC program has not been established. Thus "programs range from one person willing to give advice to those faculty who

(1995) noted that the longevity for some OCAC programs may be directly tied to the longevity of the grant used to initiate it. Weiss (1994) offered this sober reminder, "Of the eight institutions described in my 1988 study of Start-Up Strategies for Speaking Across the Curriculum, only four of their SAC programs have survived to this time" (#9 p. 2)[3]. Cronin (1995) also noted that several of the programs he reviewed during his research on the subject are no longer operating or have been significantly downsized. A lack of standard criteria and a lack of longevity make an accurate head count of OCAC programs difficult to come by.

Despite the short-lived nature of some programs, there is reason to believe the movement will continue to expand. Many programs, including the first program at what is now Central University, continue to carry out their mission and research continues to demonstrate the effectiveness of OCAC. Roberts (1995) recently wrote what he believed to be the first job posting in higher education to require OCAC experience. In addition, then Associate Director of NCA, Roy Berko said he personally felt the OCAC thrust should not be abandoned but that speech professionals must be aware of the issues involved (Weiss, #9, p. 2).

Programs such as the one initiated on the Clarkeson campus, demonstrate that the pedagogical and communication competence arguments for starting an OCAC program are valued beyond the field of communication. For example, Clarkeson's OCAC program actually originated within its school of management (Steinfatt, 1986).[4] In addition, the business school at Texas

---

[3]Robert O. Weiss serves as editor and publisher of the SAC Newsletter. Citations of this document will cite Weiss followed by the issue number and the page. At the time of this writing, the newsletter had a mailing list of 150.

[4] Clarkeson's program at last report had also been cut, another example of the fluid and hard fought nature of the movement.

Christian University received a philanthropic grant of $1.5 million to establish a center to develop effective communication skills among the students.

Conceptual Frames for Examining OCAC

In some ways it is clear that the movement is at a cross-roads. Is it a fad, a legitimate movement whose time has passed, or a viable and ongoing contribution by the field of communication to the larger university community? Answers to this question and others could be may be reached by examining the OCAC movement from several different vantage points. Four such frames will be explored here including: 1) Orality and literacy, 2) historical perspective 3) diffusion and networking, and 4) political perspective.

Orality and Literacy

Much of the momentum for OCAC comes from the idea that communication skills are a desired commodity. However, Palmerton (1992) pointed out that OCAC training extends beyond marketable skills.

> In teaching about communicative practices we are teaching processes that inevitably influence the evolution of the substance of thought. We are teaching students not just how to think, but the very structures of thought that shape their thinking. (p. 335)

Palmerton's assertion goes far beyond the credo offered by Weiss in the SAC Newsletter. The credo there focuses more on the immediacy in time and space, as well as the interaction, adaptation and collaboration typically characteristic of oral communication. (#1, p. 1; #10, p. 2). Put simply, Palmerton's justification is philosophical, Weiss' is pedagogical.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

animals. Ong seemed to agree with McLuhan in stating that writing is a technology and therefore shapes the user in the very act of adapting to the medium. Ong stated:

> Many of the features we have taken for granted in thought and expression in literature, philosophy and science, and even in oral discourse among literates, are not directly native to human existence as such but have come into being because of the resources which the technology of writing makes available to human consciousness. We have to revise our understanding of human identity. (p. 1)

Ong also identified many of the key characteristics of oral thought, noting that among other things, it is additive rather than subordinate, aggregative rather than analytic, and situational rather than abstract (p. 37 ff.). Hostettler (1980) observed "written communication must be ultimately intelligible to the reader; spoken word must be instantly intelligible to the hearer" (p. 333). It should be asked: How are these qualities of oral communication received in the literocentric environment of a typical campus today?

WAC emerged as a fairly independent movement prior to OCAC and is used extensively in the justification of OCAC programs (Morreale et al, 1993; Cronin & Glenn, 1990; Steinfatt, 1986). This could indicate a bias toward writing and thought expressed within literate conventions. However, the relationship between the written and spoken word not be antagonistic:

> Thus writing from the beginnings did not reduce orality but enhanced it, making it possible to organize the 'principles' or constituents of oratory into a scientific 'art,' a sequentially ordered body of explanation that showed

> how and why oratory achieved and could be made to achieve its various specific effects. (Ong, 1982, p. 9)

Ong asserts that electronic media, with its focus on image and immediacy, bring about a "secondary orality" (p. 136). Thus, we now encounter students who do not read in the traditional sense and who perhaps think in ways more like oral man than literate man. Several key questions emerge as we take this vantage point and look back and ahead at the OCAC movement. What does orality become in a literocentric environment? How do the concepts offered by Ong inform our understanding of the relationship between WAC and OCAC and a potential need for "Language Across the Curriculum" as a synthesizing term? How much can we focus on any specific communication skill apart from thinking skills? Given the differences between oral and literate thought, do we really teach *oral communication* or do we teach "how to speak as we write?"

Fisher (1987) put forth the argument that human beings are fundamentally story tellers not arguers. He argues that we process information in terms of narratives rather than in terms of rational facts. The narrative form is at least equally suited to oral communication and the assessment of that communication. If Fisher's position is even partly correct, it has significant implications for how OCAC advocates should talk about message production and assessment. What role do concepts such as narrative rationality play in the OCAC agenda given the distinctions made by Ong, Fisher and others? Such questions become important if the frequent linking of OCAC with "critical thinking" continues (Cronin & Glenn, 1991). Will critical thinking continue to be taught almost exclusively from what Fisher labeled the rational paradigm? Finally,

In weaving the work of Ong and Fisher into OCAC rationale certainly one can talk about the centrality of language from a pedagogical or pragmatic perspective, speaking well will make you a better student, thinker, worker, citizen. However, this discussion can go further. The argument for Fisher and Ong shifts from pedagogical to ontological and epistemological. When applying this paradigm shift to the OCAC movement, a key issue becomes assessing the movement's role in making the centrality of communication to the human condition more clearly explored and understood.

Historical

Another vantage point from which to examine at the OCAC movement is the historical perspective. This perspective, while also concerned with the centrality of communication to the human condition, raises some different questions. The ancients viewed rhetoric as central to what it means to be educated. Yet, despite its initial favored status, rhetoric has experienced a love-hate relationship with the rest of the learned community.

Conley (1990) entered the long and on-going debate about the legitimacy of the Sophists. He described sophistry as, "'a profession, not just a literary indulgence, that enabled a successful student to enter public life in one of the many municipal assemblies that were active in the provinces" (p. 60). In other words, the Sophistic movement, long considered a low point in the history of rhetoric, helped college kids speak well so that they could get good jobs. How is OCAC different? Golden, Berquist and Coleman (1983) suggest another similarity between the Sophistic movement and the OCAC movement, "The need to disseminate this knowledge and to offer advanced work was met by a band of wandering teachers . . . their function was to supplement the elementary instruction of the day" (p. 39). This is not unlike the

speech instructors work closely with other teachers to develop and assess oral activities for the non-speech classroom.[5]. Even suggesting a link between the sophists and OCAC is controversial. But could it actually be used to support the movement?

Golden et al (1978) articulated a traditional critique of sophistry echoing Plato's condemnation that the Sophists taught technique without regard for the truth. Given the tolerant, pluralistic, value-free educational philosophy found throughout much of higher education today, how can OCAC advocates function any differently than the Sophists? Should one be expected to teach "effectiveness" apart from any standard of values, ethics or "truth?"

Another way to frame the OCAC movement from a historical perspective is to look at how the canons are represented. Clearly Neo-Aristotelian assumptions about communication are not the only valid approach to teaching effective speaking skills. However, from a pedagogical standpoint, the canons do identify basic elements necessary in the development of thought and articulation. Ramus successfully "truncated" rhetoric into merely style and delivery, while invention and disposition became a part of logic (Golden, Berquist, & Coleman, 1983, p. 174). With "content" coming from the "content courses," how does the OCAC movement keep from reinforcing a similarly truncated view of the discipline?

One movement that was in a sense a legacy of Ramus was the Elocutionary movement. Conley (1990) noted that the English court was quite preoccupied with issues of delivery and thus elocution focused on punctuation and gesture (p. 213). In this image conscious age with content coming from the other courses, what will outsiders perceive the focus of OCAC to be? Will there be pressure on programs to focus on issues similar to those of the elocutionary movement because

[5] In addition to training these teachers in oral communication, the speech instructor will often guest lecture on oral communication skills necessary to successfully participate in the assignments and activities.

of the heightened awareness and attention to image so prevalent in the larger society in which universities operate?

Clearly one does not need to go back to Aristotle, Ramus and the Elocutionists to raise these questions. However, it should be noted that the historical dimensions of OCAC go far beyond discussions of its relationship with WAC programs. It is important to acknowledge that many of these issues and dynamics have risen before, therefore relevant questions, solutions and lessons can and should be drawn from these past experiences. Dance (1980) noted, "the study of spoken language is one of the oldest of organized human studies, having an oral history before the evolution of the written form of spoken language" (p. 329). Even the Sophists and Elocutionists advanced our study of communication despite their drawbacks. The challenge facing OCAC advocates is to find ways to continue to make useful contributions through OCAC's practical focus while avoiding the drawbacks associated with somewhat similar movements in our field's past. Palmerton (1991) captured this challenge well.

> Speaking Across the Curriculum programs bring further challenges to us. Our own rhetorical skills are put to the test as we attempt to adapt to the needs of our faculty audiences. By taking the SAC approach we are helping students and faculty to discover and address the rhetorical exigencies of the disciplines in which they work. It is a challenge to our own rhetorical skills to make our discipline accessible and relevant in a variety of communication contexts. (p. 7)

In a sense, OCAC and similar programs could be catalysts for restoring some of the "uni" in university. This could be true not only for faculty who have grown increasingly specialized, but for students who have trouble distinguishing departments from compartments.

It can also be argued that recent advancements in communication technology, make many of the traditional issues and questions all the more relevant. Pearce (1989), while not speaking specifically about the Sophists or the Elocutionary movement, emphasizes that many historical issues remain central despite a change in context:

> New technologies of communication have empowered communicators to do more, faster at greater distances, and with less effort than ever before, and they have greedily been put into play by those who would speak, write, listen, eavesdrop, monitor, organize, inform, persuade, educate, or entertain. These amplified powers have raised with new intensity the same old questions. (p. xvii)

Like Palmerton and Pearce, Hostettler (1980) also believed speech communication plays a central role in the liberal arts curriculum: "It seems not immoderate to claim that a study which helps students 'to understand the essence of our humanity' should have a place, even a central place in a liberal curriculum" (333). Can and should OCAC be the vehicle through which this centrality is pursued? A look at our history may guide our decision on how OCAC can be source of advocacy for the discipline rather than a source of anxiety.

Networks and Diffusion

Networks and diffusion are complimentary constructs, as innovations need networks over which to diffuse. This hold true for the start of an OCAC program. Many of the grants used to initiate OCAC programs call for the assessment and dissemination of the program's results. The assumption is that the dissemination of results will foster greater adoption of this innovation in higher education. Still, we have many unanswered questions about why some campuses adopt

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

and why some don't, or why some OCAC programs endure and others do not. Examining these questions through the lenses of diffusion and networks may help us focus our views.

Networks. "Networks are social structures created by communication among individuals and groups" (Littlejohn, 1992, p. 317). Networks establish their own structure, which may or may not coordinate with the official structure of the group or organization. For MacDonald (1976), identifying the structure of these networks is the first step in understanding the dynamics of an organization. He also noted that, "the nature of the organization and its history may provide insight" to its actions and dynamics (p. 373). Therefore, rather than a generic report of "how we did it at our place," it may prove more useful to identify and report on the most salient, unique characteristics of a particular campus and how those characteristics influenced the adoption of an OCAC program. Even having instruments, such as McPhee's (1986) model for analyzing social networks in organizations, in place for zero-history situations could prove beneficial. Including an assessment of the invigoration of communication networks among faculty and students, as well as an assessment of the program's pedagogical impact may help us determine why certain campuses adopt OCAC programs and why they may or may not flourish.

Bullis and Wackernagel Bach (1991) looked at communication networks from the theoretical framework of organizational identification, which they believe to be fostered by multiplexity. "Multiplexity is defined as the degree to which multiple contents flow through a dyadic link" (p. 183). The analogy of gluing to surfaces together might illustrate the principle--the greater the common surface area, the stronger the bond. These authors called for a continued investigation of this link, particularly among various organizations to determine if results differ. How might OCAC generate dimensions of multiplexity and organizational health by fostering

about within existing networks and on the networks it may generate? The taping of meetings, the keeping of journals, and the use of interviews could shed light on these important questions.

Bantz (1993) stated, "examining messages sent and used in organizations is the main route to understanding organizations as symbolic entities constituted by their messages" (p. 1). For Bantz, notes, memos, hallway discussion, e-mail, and the like are as valid materials for making sense of an OCAC program's impact as is student evaluations and official promotional materials. How might such analysis demonstrate (quantify) that an OCAC program fostered a stronger organizational culture and multiplexy and provide additional support for its existence?

Diffusion. "The diffusion of innovation occurs when an idea spreads from a point of origin to surrounding geographic areas or from person to person within a single area" (Littlejohn, 1992, p. 353). This simple idea has fostered a significant body of research. By as early as 1979, Rogers and Adhikarya say thousands of studies on diffusion had been done. This is partly due to the flexible application of the concept.

> The diffusion model is a conceptual paradigm with relevance for many disciplines... Organizational scholars are concerned with processes and patterns of change in and between institutions and in how their relation to structure is altered over time. (p. 68)

Diffusion is another appropriate organizing construct for examining OCAC. "A diffusion approach seems to promise to provide solutions to organizations (a) that have invested in research on some topic and seek to get it utilized and/or (b) desire to use the research results to solve a particular social problem" (p. 68). The aims of OCAC fall within these parameters offered by Rogers and Adhikarya. Littlejohn (1992) noted that a key outcome of diffusion research is

finding ways to shorten the lag. This lag might be looked at from a macro perspective--diffusion between campuses-- as well as from a micro perspective--diffusion within a campus.

Rogers and Adhikarya (1979) offered five stages to innovation.

> 1) Agenda-setting. the definition of general organizational problems that may create a perceived need for innovation. 2) Matching. A problem from the organization's agenda and an alternative solution (that is, an innovation) are brought together and consideration is given to their fit. 3) Redefining. The innovation is defined in terms relevant to the particular organization and its perceived problem as the technological solution is modified to fit these specific conditions. 4) Structuring. Organizational structures directly relevant to the innovation are altered to accommodate the innovation. 5) Interconnecting. The relationship between the innovation and the rest of the organization are clarified, so that the innovation eventually loses its separate identity and becomes an on-going element in the organization's activities. (p. 76-77)

Stages four and five provide some particularly interesting implications. Clearly stage four is necessary for any program to survive after the initial start up funding is depleted. Physical space for OCAC and other resources must become part of the structure of the organization, however these commodities are often hard to come by. Stage five may not come so easily either. According to stage five, a program can diminish from prominence without being a failure. Therefore, analysis of "failed" programs may or may not reveal rejection of the core tenants of OCAC. It is also plausible that in some instances there could be such ample internalization of the

superfluous--just as a program entitled Multiple Choice Testing After Straightforward Lecturing Across the Curriculum (MCTASFLAC) would seem a bit unnecessary today on many campuses.

Given the apparent parallels between the steps for diffusion of innovation and the development of an OCAC program, what might the thousands of studies on diffusion offer for advocates of OCAC? Clearly, many of the studies would not be relevant, but if even half of them are, then hundreds of studies await fruitful analysis. What were/are the cultural factors and organizational characteristics of early adopters? Why did some programs fail to "take" in given settings? In addition, the micro perspective that might track opinion leaders and use of the program within the organization, would bring a productive overlap between diffusion and network analysis. Equally important, what might be learned about diffusion within the university setting?

Political

Several of the issues already raised unveil the political dimensions of the OCAC movement. For example, the unusual tabling by a national organization of a unanimously recommended report signifies that more than pedagogy may be at stake here. Bacharach and Lawler (1980) highlighted the political nature of organizations:

> Organizations are neither the rational, harmonious entities celebrated in managerial theory nor the arena of apocalyptic class conflict projected by the Marxists. Rather, it may be argued, a more suitable notion lies somewhere in between those two--a concept of organizations as politically negotiated orders. Adopting this view, we can observe organizational actors in their daily transactions perpetually bargaining, repeatedly forming

> and reforming coalitions, and constantly availing themselves of influence tactics. (p. 1)

In essence, when one takes a political view of an organization or a movement, one is looking at issues of power, influence, and preservation. Decisions then, within that organization or movement, are made largely on the basis of perceived future outcomes with respect to power, influence and survival.

Many speech communication professionals are concerned about outsiders' perceptions of the field of communication. Petelle (1980) surveyed chairpersons outside of the field and found that poor ratings of the field don't coincide with the centrality of speech in human development. That is, even chairs who don't know about, or think poorly about the field of communication still find communication a valuable skill. The results of his study-- and the fact that as a field we feel the need to engage in such research--is disheartening. Central to this discussion is Petelle's call for relevant research:

> . . . when the results of such research . . . can be *seen to apply* to the population of humans for whom it is intended (utilitarianism), and when such efforts are *integrated* and can be *seen to be integrated* (i.e., inter-departmental cooperation), then perhaps speech communication will no longer have to struggle with the nature of our status, the extent of our distinctiveness, or our place in the educational hierarchy. (p. 359-360 emphasis in the original)

Of note here, is his reference to the hierarchy within higher education. If decisions are made for the impact they will have on the position of the field, then it can be argued that these decisions are political in nature. There are also hints of some of the other themes raised thus far. In particular,

the identification of inter-departmental cooperation can be in light of the multiplexy issue raised above.

Paulson (1980) goes further by asserting that the very survival of various disciplines on campus may be at stake. He concluded, "programs important to the special character or mission of the institution will be more highly valued" (p. 322). Paulson points toward a notion developed more fully by Bacharach and Lawler (1980). These authors adopted a social exchange approach when discussing power and argued that, "without dependence, there is no reason for an exchange, because parties can operate and obtain outcomes in total isolation" (p. 19). They continued, stating that "power is a function of dependence" (p. 20).

But how does this political perspective help make sense of the OCAC movement? It reveals that OCAC is not merely a pedagogical movement. As Palmerton (1991) observed:

> It is not unusual for Speaking Across the Curriculum to be advanced by a college or university administrator. There are a variety of reasons offered for this sudden interest in oral communication competence, the recent national emphasis on communication generally not the least of those reasons. Yet we are suspicious--and rightly so. What is the real motivation behind an administrator's proffered idea?" (p. 1).

She goes on to warn that if the motive is not firmly grounded in the value of cross-disciplinary involvement, then disaster may await.

From a political perspective, one might compare the success rates of top-down initiated OCAC programs with those initiated from the bottom up. This perspective identifies "ownership" of the program as a central issue. Should the program be linked with the speech department?

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

service role that diminishes overall influence on campus and beyond? Issues of accreditation also give rise to essentially political questions. What role does accreditation play in OCAC programs after they are initially funded? Does it create hostility and the perception of more governmental or administrative "hoops?" Should accreditation issues be down-played or stressed as reasons for initiating an OCAC program? Many of the answers to these questions could emerge from the dialogue and stories told about OCAC programs on a given campus. Mumby (1987) explored the political function of narratives within organizations. He noted that power is a central issue in the political critique of the narrative. In addition he stated

> ...the story best serves an ideological function through the process of reification. Simply by virtue of its narrative structure, the story form lends itself to an infinite number of recountings. (p. 122)

If Mumby is correct then faculty retreats and not formal arguments may be the key to greater recognition in the "hierarchy." If retreats produce the stories necessary to create a positive image of the OCAC program, they may be as influential in the diffusion and longevity of the program in a given institution as formal arguments for its existence. Testimonies--of students and faculty--may become as central as statistics.

Is the OCAC movement is here to stay? It is for the foreseeable future. Programs will continue to be implemented, with or without the cooperation of a speech department (Palmerton, 1991, Steinfatt, 1986). The challenge from the political perspective becomes, how to ensure that the programs preserve and enhance, or at least don't damage, the perceived and real integrity and status of the speech communication field with which it will always be associated.

Conclusion

While this examination set out to raise many more questions than it answered, it does, however, answer the question, "Do we have anything else to talk about besides communication competence, pedagogical impact, assessment, and how we did it at our place?" Perspectives that could productively illuminate the OCAC movement abound, and many more specific pedagogical issues concerning the movement could be raised.

It is time to mature, not just as a movement, but in the analysis of the movement. Publications and conference papers need greater commitment to *specific problems and how they were solved*. The four perspectives offer here--orality and literacy, historical, diffusion and networks, and political--can provide a lens from which to begin examining unique characteristics, problems and solutions of specific OCAC programs, thereby helping us to see the movement more clearly.

Works Consulted

Bacharach, S. B., & Lawler, E. J. (1980). Power and politics in organizations. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Bantz, C. R. (1993). Understanding organizations: interpreting organizational communication culture. Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina.

Bullis, C., & Wackernagel Bach, B. (1991). An explication and test of communication network content and multiplexity as predictors of organizational identification. Western Journal of Speech Communication, 55, 180-197.

Clark, D. M. (1992). E. C. Ames Fellowship report. Author. [Report on Sabbatical visitation of several significant OCAC programs]

Conley, T. M. (1990). Rhetoric in the European tradition. Chicago: University of Chicago.

Cronin, M. (Speaker). (1995). [Recorded phone interview conducted by Richard Olsen).

Cronin, M., & Glenn, P. (1991). Oral communication across the curriculum in higher education: The state of the art. Communication Education, 40, 356-367.

Cronin, M., & Grice, G. (1993). A comparative analysis of training models versus consulting/training models for implementing oral communication across the curriculum. Communication Education, 42, 1-9.

Cronin, M., & Grice, G. (1991). Oral communication across the curriculum. The Carolinas Speech Communication Annual, 7, 34-45.

Curtis, D. B., Winsor, J. L., & Stephens, R. D. (1989). National preferences in business and communication education. Communication Education, 38, 6-14.

Dance, F. E. X. (1980). Speech communication as a liberal arts discipline. Communication Education, 29, 328-331.

Fisher, W. R. (1987). Human communication as narration. Toward a philosophy of reason, value and action. Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina.

Golden, J. L. , Berquist, G. F., & Coleman, William E. (1978). The rhetoric of western thought, (3rd ed.). Dubuque: Kendall/Hunt.

Hostettler, G. F (1980). Speech as a liberal study II. Communication Education, 29, 332-347.

Illich, I., & Sanders B. (1988). The alphabetization of the popular mind. New York: Random House.

Johannesen, R. L., Strickland, R., & Eubanks, R. T. (Eds.). (1970). Language is sermonic: Richard M. Weaver on the nature of rhetoric. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University.

Kaplan, A (1964). The conduct of inquiry. New York: Chandler.

Littlejohn, S. W. (1992). Theories of Human Communication, (4th ed.). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

MacDonald, D. (1976). Communication roles and communication networks in formal organization. Human Communication Research, 2, 365-375.

McPhee R. D. (1986). A model of social network development in organizations. Central States Speech Journal, 37, 8-18.

Mumby, D. K. (1987). The political function of narrative in organizations. Communication Monographs, 54, 113-127.

Ong, W. J. (1993). Orality and literacy: The technologizing of the word. New York: Routledge.

Palmerton, P. R. (1992). Teaching skills or teaching thinking? Journal of Applied Communication Research, 20, 335-341.

Palmerton, P. R. (1991). Speaking across the curriculum: Threat, opportunity or both. ACA Bulletin, 76, 1-10.

Paulson, S. F. (1980). Speech communication and the survival of academic disciplines. Communication Education, 29, 319-323.

Pearce, W. B. (1989). Communication and the human condition. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University.

Petelle, J. L. (1980). Speech communication: Status, distinctiveness, and the educational hierarchy. Communication Education, 29, 357-360.

Phillips, Gerald. (1984). A competent view of "Competence." Communication Education, 33, 25-36.

Roberts, C. (Speaker). (1995) [recorded phone interview conducted by Richard Olsen]

Rogers, E. M., & Adhikarya, R. (1979). Diffusion of innovations: An up-to-date review and commentary. In Nimmo, D. (Ed.), Communication Yearbook 3. (pp. 67-81). New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction.

Rubin, R. B., & Graham, E. E. (1988). Communication correlates of college success: An exploratory investigation. Communication Education, 37, 14-27.

Speech Communication Association. (1993). Report of the subcommittee of the educational policies board, speech communication association: Oral communication in the undergraduate general education curriculum. [Unpublished draft of contested report.]

Steinfatt, T. M. (1986). Communication across the curriculum. Communication Quarterly, 34, 460-470.

Weiss R. O. (Ed.). (1992). A decade of oral communication across the curriculum: An evaluation of the Depauw University oral communication competency program. Greencastle, IN: Depauw

Weiss R. O. (Personal communication, April 15, 1995)

Weiss R. O. (Ed.). SAC Newsletter: Speaking Across the Curriculum. 1990-present.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE